

For it was the mastery of man over his environment which heralded the dawn of the new age, and it was in the stress of expanding economic energies that this mastery was proved and won. Like sovereignty in a feudal society, the economic efforts of the Middle Ages, except in a few favoured spots, had been fragmentary and decentralized. Now the scattered raiders wore to be organized and disciplined ; the dispersed and irregular skirmishes were to be merged in a grand struggle, on a front which stretched from the Baltic to the Ganges and from the Spice Islands to Peru. Every year brought the news of fresh triumphs". The general who marshalled the host and launched the attack was economic power.

Economic power, long at home in Italy," was leaking through a thousand creeks and inlets into western Europe, for a century before, with the climax of the great Discoveries, the flood came on breast-high. Whatever its truth as a judgment on the politics of the fifteenth century, the conventional verdict on its futility does scanty justice to its economic significance. It was in an age of political anarchy that the forces destined to dominate the future tried their wings. The era of Columbus and Da Gama was prepared by the patient labour of Italian cartographers and Portuguese seamen, as certainly as was that of Crompton and

Watt by the
obscure experiments of nameless
predecessors.

The master who set the problem that the
heroes of
the age were to solve was material
necessity. The

Europe of the earlier Middle Ages, like the
world of the
twentieth century, had been a closed
circle. But it

had been closed, not by the growth of
knowledge, but

by the continuance of ignorance ; and,
while the latter,

having drawn the whole globe into a single
economic

system, has no space left for fresh
expansion, for the

former, with the Mediterranean as its
immemorial

pivot, expansion had hardly begun.
Tapping the

wealth of the East by way of the narrow
apertures in

the Levant, it resembled, in the rigidity of
the limits